LIBRARY STRATEGIES

ICfL Capital Improvement Grant Consulting Support

**Webinar 2 of 8:
Community Needs Assessment**

Webinars @ A Glance

1. Remodels, Expansions, and Rebuilds "101" [10/24/23]

2. Needs Assessment [TODAY!]

3. Funding (Public + Private) [12/7/23]

4. Architects, Contractors, and Bidding [1/4/24]

5. Construction Administration [2/1/24]

6. Moving & (Re)opening [3/7/24]

7. Case Study Spotlight #1: Renovations & Redesigns [4/4/24]

8. Case Study Spotlight #2: New Builds & Rebuilds [5/2/24]

What is a needs assessment, anyway?

- A versatile planning tool involving the entire community (or a representative sampling)

- Utilizes a variety of data methods to determine, articulate and prioritize needs

- Specifically, provides usable information on user <u>s</u>atisfaction, <u>s</u>ervices and <u>s</u>paces.

Why conduct a needs assessment?

- Articulate barriers to library use

- Pinpoint under-met needs as these exist today

- Identify shifting and emerging needs (attributable to changing demographics, "changing times," and other factors)

- Identify short/long-term reinvestment strategies

Political Considerations (1 of 5)

Build case/rationale for public reinvestment

- How are public libraries different from school (or academic) libraries?

- Why are public libraries still critically important?

- Why is this a priority for YOUR city/county/district?

- Understand the goals and motivations of your local officials and staff

- Relationship-building leads up to the crucial moment!

Determine probable funding support / mechanisms

Operations

- The hardest to secure ("it's forever")

- Needs sustainable city/county/district source

- Have you first updated your service model and org chart?

Determine probable funding support / mechanisms

Capital

- Easier* to secure (it's "one-time")
- Mixed funding model
  - Public funds
  - Private donors
  - Corporate donors
  - Grants

*at least by comparison, but still hard!

Political Considerations (4 of 5)

Identify likely road bumps

- Poor or irrelevant messaging/narrative

- Lack of general support from residents

- Other public projects are in line

- Surprises: Poor economy or sudden funding (like current ICfL funds)

- Elections

Political Considerations (5 of 5)

Understand larger landscape in which a capital reinvestment would occur

- Partnerships and collaboration!

- Co-locations (city hall and library; senior center and library; etc.)

- Sudden development opportunity (led by Economic Develop Agency or other)

Participant Considerations (1 of 2)

Prioritize underheard voices

- Know your community

- Who are you serving and not serving?

- How will this capital/operating investment address other community needs?

- Talk to leaders of orgs that serve these "underheard voices"

- Expand your definition of "public library" by understanding industry trends (see Webinar #1)

- Is your library reflecting the whole community?

Participant Considerations (2 of 2)

Hard-to-reach groups

- As mentioned, start with leaders of org's that serve these "underheard voices"

- Go to where these "underheard voices" are: churches; ethnic gatherings; laundromats; homeless shelters; jails/prisons; senior/low-income housing; homeschool groups; etc.

- Read about what other libraries are doing, especially regarding social work and workforce development initiatives

- Be brave and engage with dignity

Community Engagement Tactics

Community Survey

- Easiest and cheapest way to solicit input from many residents

- Best done early: preliminary findings can help identify/hone major themes and hot-button issues

- Disproportionally favors library's heaviest users, biggest boosters

Community Engagement Tactics

1:1 Interviews

- Structured sit-downs with leaders in your community who have some outsized knowledge about the landscape in which your library is operating
    - Candidates include elected officials, town administrators, school leaders, reps from key stakeholder groups

- Primary benefit: better grasp the needs of the community

- Secondary benefit: cultivate interest and buy-in in your vision for a revitalized library from folks who are well positioned to champion that vision
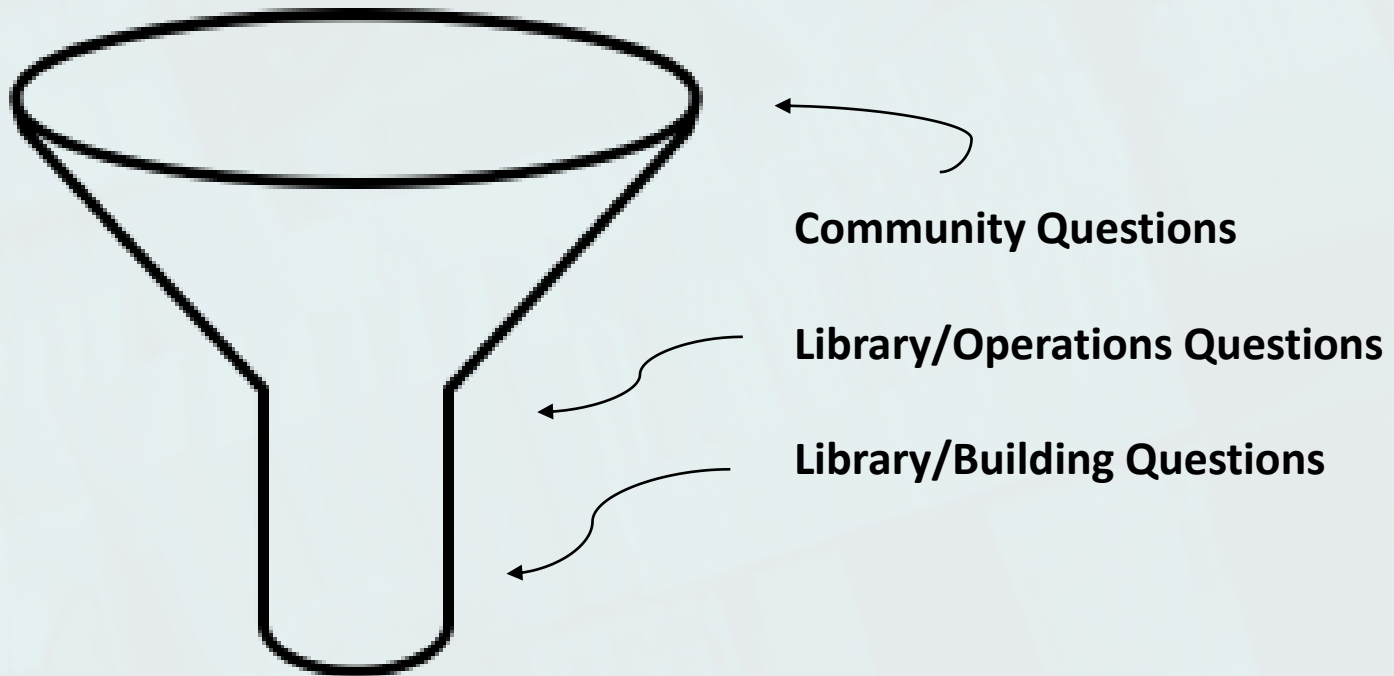
Community Engagement Tactics

Real-Time Group Activity Options

- Focus Groups

    - Attendance: target 6-10 per session

    - Duration: 1.5-2 hrs

- Listening Sessions

    - Attendance: ???

    - Duration: 1-2 hrs

- Community Retreat

    - Attendance: 30+ participants

    - Duration: 4+ hours (with various components)

Community Engagement Tactics

Funnel Approach

Community Questions

Library/Operations Questions

Library/Building Questions

Community Engagement Tactics

Staff Exercises

- Staff have an organic, rounded understanding of the library's chief pain points

    - Community assessment takeaways rarely surprise staff!

    - Staff surveys and SWOT exercises capture their knowledge and allow them to feel enfranchised by the process

- Caveat: Staff and administration voices are broadly perceived as biased (and not necessarily representative of the community's needs or wishes)

LIBRARY STRATEGIES

Community Engagement Tactics

Steering Committee

- Intentional brainstorming and invitation processes pay major dividends!

- Consider enlisting community members ("steering committee") to help the library drum up a varied participant pool

  - ("Varied" means a mix of ages, professions, library usage habits, and lengths of residency in the community.)

  - Target people well positioned to reach local audiences which the library customarily does not.

  - Candidates could include reps from area schools, local gov't, business community, social services, civic groups, etc.

Cost-Effective Tips

- Find local partners to help "carry the water"

- Partner with a nearby library or an allied nonprofit to lead *reciprocal* assessments processes

- Integrate passive engagement opportunities into community input process

- Use data from state and federal resources to benchmark library needs and performance against peer systems

Common Mistakes

- Doing nothing at all – not even taking small steps

- Failing to craft an inclusive process which engages a wide swathe of the community

- Not asking what you really want to know

- Avoiding areas where you (think you) already know (some) answers

- Not outlining findings in useable form and/or sharing with community stakeholders who can make a difference

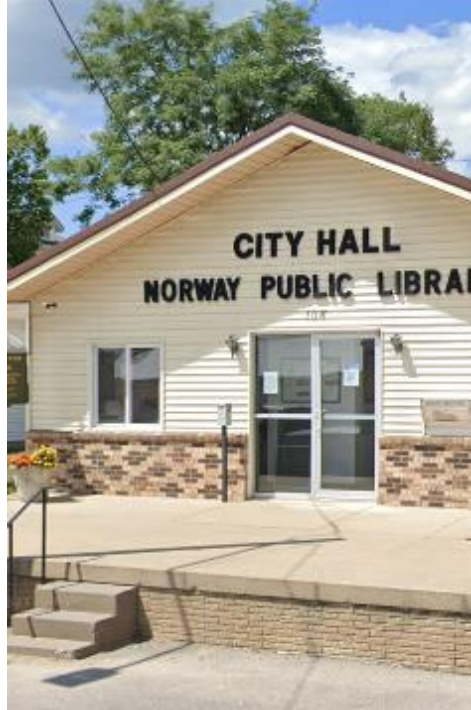- Allowing finished report to gather dust on the shelf………..

Goal

Written summary that
1) captures community needs and
sentiments in a compelling way, and
2) offers <u>credible</u>, <u>actionable</u>
recommendations for next steps

Webinar 3:
Public + Private Funding

December 7, 2023

REGISTER @ bit.ly/ICfLWebinar3

QUESTIONS?